

# **The Hague, The Netherlands: 2005 OSAC Crime and Safety Report**

## **CRIME AND SAFETY**

### **Europe - Netherlands**

24 Aug 2005

#### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

The risk of violent crime is low throughout most of the Netherlands. No violent crimes specifically targeting tourists or foreign visitors have been reported to the U.S. Embassy in The Hague. In 2004, there was a slight increase in violent crime in Amsterdam and Rotterdam; however, the overall occurrence of violent crime is rare. Tourists and public transportation commuters are frequently victims of petty crime such as pickpocketing, luggage theft and laptop computer theft at airports and train stations. Amsterdam is also home to a significant number of fraud rings who capitalize on the "419 advance fee fraud," also known as the Nigerian money transfer fraud.

#### **Political Violence**

Demonstrations, ranging in size from a few persons to several thousand, are common in the Netherlands. In the past, demonstrators have become violent and unruly. During a large demonstration in 1998, several demonstrators caused significant property damage to the American Embassy and Consulate General. Police support during subsequent demonstrations has steadily improved.

Prior police approval is required for public demonstrations in the Netherlands, and police oversight is routinely provided to ensure adequate security for participants and bystanders. Nonetheless, situations may develop which could pose a threat to public safety. U.S. citizens are advised to avoid areas in which public demonstrations are taking place.

Although demonstrations may occur anywhere, most demonstrations in The Hague begin at the "Malieveld," a grass field area adjacent to the central train station. Typical demonstration points include embassies in the Centrum area, the Parliament, the Foreign Ministry and the Peace Palace. Demonstrations in The Hague usually conclude with a rally at the Malieveld. Demonstrations in Amsterdam are common on the Museum Plein and at

Dam Square.

### **Post-Specific Concerns**

Since July 9, 2004, the Dutch Government has implemented heightened security measures in response to concerns of terrorist activity. The embassy would like to encourage U.S. citizens to monitor media reports and maintain a high level of vigilance.

Tensions of terrorism activity in the Netherlands remain high following two terrorism-related incidents in November 2004. First, on November 2, 2004, a Dutch film producer, known for his outspoken criticism of Islam, was murdered by a suspected Islamic extremist. Second, on November 10, 2004, a raid was conducted on a home of suspected terrorists, which led to an all-day standoff. During the raid, some suspects inside of the house, as well as law enforcement authorities, sustained non-fatal injuries. Three suspected terrorists were detained from the incident. Subsequent arrests were made in connection to this raid and further investigation revealed that these suspects had ties to known terrorist groups. These events initiated a government-wide overhaul of its counterterrorism measures, including providing more resources to combat violent Islamic radicalism. In response to the attacks, there have been a series of protests and arson attacks directed at mosques and Islamic schools in the Netherlands. In addition, there have been a significant number of retaliatory actions against several churches.

The Netherlands has a very tolerant policy to soft drugs, such as XTC/Ecstasy and 5 grams or less of cannabis sold in coffee shops. The policies toward hard drugs, i.e., heroine and cocaine, are similar to those of the U.S. Persons violating Dutch laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses.

### **Police and Emergency Response**

The emergency telephone throughout the Netherlands is "112" and can be used for all emergencies, i.e. fire, police and ambulance. Operators answer in Dutch but do speak English. A police report can be filed at any police station and will be written in Dutch. Various major police forces offer special assistance and support to victims of crime. American citizens who need replacement passports, who are arrested or detained by the police, or are victims of crime may seek assistance from the American Citizens Services

section of the Consulate General by calling (0) 20 575 5309 during normal working hours or (0) 70 310 9499 during nights, weekends, and holidays.

### **Medical Contact Information**

Good medical facilities are widely available. The national emergency number for medical, police or fire services is "112". If your situation warrants, you should seek assistance from a hospital. These institutions are staffed and equipped to deal with emergency situations. Americans are strongly urged to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and whether it will cover emergency expenses. Travelers who have purchased overseas medical insurance have found it to be life saving when a medical emergency occurs. Emergency services (including transportation by ambulance) are not free and you will be billed for any services rendered to you.

The Netherlands Association of Hospitals has compiled a list of all Dutch hospitals on the following web site: <http://www.ziekenhuis.nl>

The medical care sector in the Netherlands is based on a referral system. For non-emergency medical assistance, you are obliged to consult a general practitioner (Huisarts) before attempting to obtain non-emergency medical treatment from a specialist.

If you are staying in a hotel, contact the reception desk and they will direct you to the doctor assigned to that hotel. If you are staying with a friend or family, contact their family doctor. The American Consulate General maintains a referral list of medical professionals, which can be accessed on the U.S. Embassy web site at <http://www.usemb.nl/casphysi.html>. The list is compiled at random principally for the purpose of assisting transient American citizens with medical needs.

### **Tips to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

Thieves, often working in pairs, particularly target the train from Schiphol Airport to Amsterdam Central Station. A common tactic used by thieves in areas with a heavy concentration of tourists occurs when one thief distracts the victim, often by asking for directions or by pretending to drop something, while an accomplice moves in on the

victim's momentarily unguarded handbag, backpack, or briefcase. The thieves typically time their thefts to coincide with train stops so they may quickly exit.

Within Amsterdam, thieves are very active in and around the Central Train Station, the WTC/Zuid train and tram stations, the red light district, in restaurants, hotels, and on public transportation, especially trams 1, 2, and 5 between the Central Station and the Museum District.

It is recommended that businesses check with the local police before entering into a contract for private security or with a guard company.

Those parking vehicles on public streets should use anti-theft devices and avoid leaving packages in plain sight.

### **OSAC Country Council**

The Hague Country Council meets regularly. All private sector security executives are welcome to contact the Regional Security Officer for individual consultations and briefings, as well as the dates and times of future meetings of the OSAC Country Council at the American Embassy The Hague. Visit the council online at <http://thehague.ds-osac.org>.

### **For Further Information**

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